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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000565

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT ELECTION RESULTS: NO WOMEN, GAINS FOR
SALAFIS, SHI'A; NO FOREIGN POLICY IMPACT

REF: A. KUWAIT 554 B. KUWAIT 411 C. KUWAIT 205 D. 07KUWAIT 156

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: As widely predicted, both Shi'as and Salafis gained parliamentary seats in the Kuwaiti May 17 elections. No female candidates won, although one came tantalizingly close. Per GOK protocol, the full Cabinet resigned; the Amir is expected to appoint a new one within 14 days. Apart from the ceremonial first session (constitutionally held 14 days after the announcement of results) during which the Amir will preside and the Cabinet will take its oath, the real work of the Parliament will not likely begin until the fall, after Ramadan. Tensions between Parliament and the GOK will likely surface with renewed grillings of ministers (possibly Interior and Defense). Moderate MP Jassem Al-Khorafi is expected to be re-elected as Speaker. Shi'a did not make the gains they desired, but the background of those elected is significant. Four of the five are hardliners and their election underscores an increasingly important sectarian political line in Kuwait. It is unlikely that the outcome of this election will have any direct effect on Kuwaiti foreign policy or its relations with the U.S. Post will report the names and brief bio data of the new Parliament as well as media reactions septel. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION DAY

12. (U) According to media reports, the turnout for the May 17 election was lower than for the 2006 elections. Of the 361,684 registered voters, only 60 percent went to the polls as compared to 66 percent that voted two years ago. The gender breakdown by eligible voters was 75 percent for males and 50 percent for females (which is an increase from 44 percent in 2006, when women were allowed to vote for the first time). Women constitute 55 percent of eligible voters and some have suggested that had more women voted, at least one of the strong female candidates might have had a better chance of winning a seat.

THE NEW PARLIAMENT: MORE OF THE SAME

13. (U) Of the 50 MPs from the previous National Assembly (dissolved on March 19), 38 sought re-election and 28 were successful. Although there are some new faces and the numbers of representatives from the various political associations has shifted slightly, the overall make-up of Parliament is little changed. The composition of the Parliament by affiliation is as follows:

- Islamists, 23
- Islamic Constitutional Movement, 3
- Salafi Islamic Grouping, 4
- Independent Islamists, 11

- Shi'a, 5
- Liberals, 4
- Pro-Government, 11
- Not affiliated, 12

WOMEN AND SHI'A: LOSSES AND GAINS

¶4. (U) In their second opportunity to both vote and run for office, the women of Kuwait again failed to assert the power of their numbers. None of the 27 women candidates was successful in her bid to become Kuwait's first female MP. Dr. Aseel Al-Awadi, the only female to run on an organized ticket with three males, received 5173 votes, the largest number of votes cast for a woman. She came the closest to winning a seat by coming in eleventh in her constituency (NB: The top ten vote getters in each of the five districts are elected). Dr. Rola Dashti placed twelfth in the same constituency with 4464 votes, the second largest number of votes for a woman. Several commentaries in the press expressed disappointment with the results for women and chided female voters for backing unqualified men over strong women candidates.

¶5. (C) The number of Shi'a lawmakers (all Islamists) increased in this Parliament by one, bringing their total to five. While lower than the eight to twelve they had been hoping for (Ref B), the numerical gain gives them an obstructionist edge. Even more important is the fact that all are Kuwaiti Hizbollah-linked religious conservatives.

The victories of Adnan Abdulsamad and Ahmad Lari (leading participants in the eulogy of Imad Mugniyah that sparked sectarian tensions in February (Ref C)), as well as Hussein Al-Qallaf (denoted as a "Khomeini" MP from the 2003 Parliament), will likely deepen an emerging Sunni-Shi'a divide in a society where Sunni-Shi'a relations have historically been good. In the aftermath of the Mugniyah scandal, even secular, moderate Shi'a apparently voted for hardliners as best equipped to counter perceived growing anti-Shi'a sentiment from the GOK and Sunni majority.

¶6. (C) The Salafi Islamic Grouping and its allies, gained ten seats in the new Parliament, doubling their representation from the previous Parliament. The Salafist bloc will now become the single largest bloc in the new National Assembly.

NEXT STEPS: A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT FOR 14 DAYS

¶7. (C) Per GOK protocol, the Cabinet resigned en masse on Monday, May 19 and will assume the role of caretaker government until the Amir appoints a new Cabinet. The 14-day period leading up to the first session of Parliament (o/a June 1, 2008), when the new ministers will take their oaths, will be a time of transition and re-evaluation of the Cabinet. Despite the current Cabinet's short tenure, changes to positions and/or portfolios is likely in store (NB: The Cabinet was appointed in October 2007 when the Amir made changes to both ministers and portfolios in another attempt to end political gridlock.). Some are speculating that the Minister of Interior, Shaykh Jaber Al-Khaled Al Sabah, may be replaced due to widespread dissatisfaction with his tough (if less than successful) crackdown on illegal tribal primaries during the election season, while other observers applauded his efforts.

 Comment

¶8. (C) Given the make-up of the new Parliament, political battlelines will likely take shape in the fall (after an anticipated July - October recess) and bring renewed tensions between parliament and the GOK. The inauguration of the new

parliament is likely to start on a positive note, with a show of good intentions from all sides; but as the session progresses, personal/tribal loyalties and agendas will surface to keep the legislative processes gridlocked as before. The Al Sabah approach will be to work backroom deals with various factions, further drawing criticism from Kuwaiti constituencies who already deem the ruling family too weak to take recalcitrant MPs head on. Jassem Al-Khorafi is likely to be re-elected as Speaker of Parliament; he is seen as a conciliatory leader and politically savvy. He is also close to the Amir and, as Speaker, per protocol, third in the line of authority. He will have difficulty bringing order to the Parliament and its many MPs known for grandstanding on issues and their attacks on Cabinet members; the Ministers of the Interior and Defense are two probable candidates for grilling in the fall. Another factor at play is the soon to be decided make-up of the new Cabinet and how this body will interact with the new Parliament.

¶9. (C) The Shi'a did not gain their desired number of seats, but did elect two hardline Kuwaiti Hizbollah MPs (Abdulsamad and Lari) as well as another (Al-Qallaf) known for his direct links to Tehran. In a vote that clearly denotes sectarianism, four of the five Shi'a MPs were elected over moderates because their electorates felt that strong personalities, capable of confronting the Sunni majority, were needed in order to uphold Shi'a interests on their behalf.

¶10. (C) It is unlikely that the outcome of these elections will have any direct effect on Kuwaiti foreign policy or its relations with the U.S. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) Post will report the names and brief bio data of the members of the new Parliament as well as media reaction septel.

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